

Mary Grace G. 9th gr poem

I am a Patriot

Patriotism is the love of one's country

Some have more love to offer than others

Some go as far as laying down their lives for our country

Whether its leaving behind family, or moving family half way across the world

We all serve in different ways

I am proud to say I am part of a family who serves in today's America.

Poem - 9 - F

Malvika V. 9th gr poem

Patriotism

Often symbolized by flags, anthems and slogans

Considered by people as a love of country

But Patriotism today bears a deeper meaning

Better represented by

Showing love and loyalty to fellow citizens

Appreciating what is great about America

While thinking about what it takes to create and sustain

Greatness

Adopting our founding values into actions that

Deliver results relevant to our current society

Working day by day

To make our country better

Believing that our country can be a better place tomorrow

Than it is today

Standing up for your beliefs and making a change

Striving to be the global leaders Americans have always been

Patriotism

The spirit that brings citizens of America together

Regardless of other distinctions

Patriotism

Exhibited most truly in actions

Not symbolisms or words

Gone are the days when patriotism was interpreted as

The waving of the flag

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Or the sparks of fireworks

High in the sky

On the fourth of July

Christine W. 9th grade essay

October 1st was the worst holiday out of the whole year. Even though school was off that day, the best entertainment option was a long television broadcast. For over an hour, people were expected to watch a parade of marching soldiers, a few tanks and maybe a flying airplane. The first time I watched the broadcast, I fell asleep halfway through. Therefore, that also turned out to be the last time I voluntarily watched the boring parade. But as a Zhong Guo Ren, or one of the Chinese People and a resident of China, I was supposed to appreciate China's Independence Day, or Guo Qin Jie.

Eventually, people tried explaining to me why Guo Qin Jie was even better than Chinese New Year, despite the fact that while one holiday had delicious food and beautiful fireworks, the other has a patriotic Sing-Along and screening of patriotic movies. China's Independence Day was a day to celebrate the greatest country in the whole world, which is supposed to be China. The words "Guo Qing Jie" literally mean Nation Celebration Day. Like all the posters, songs, movies and textbooks say, China was treated poorly by the world, and every other country is inferior. As all "true" patriots believe, this is a day to remind ourselves what a great nation we are, despite what reality really looks like.

That was what patriots were supposed to think. As I grew up in Beijing, I gathered a pretty good idea on how easy it is to be patriotic in China. Patriotism in China meant singing the National Anthem every morning, wearing the hong lin jing, a red scarf symbolizing loyalty and devotion to the country's leaders, praising anything the government chooses to do, watching government sponsored propaganda and acting emotional whenever the flag is raised. That was basically what everybody did. Like me, they made bigger deals out of Chinese New Year and the Lunar Festival than the birth of their country.

The year I was going to turn 10, my family visited the US during the summer. Even though I was born in Maryland, my family moved to China before I remember anything. When America's Independence Day came around, my family went to watch the parade live at D.C. I lived for 6 years in China, yet we were never able to watch the Chinese parade in person. For everyone to be "equal", nobody was allowed to be at the spacious Tiananmen Square, except for a few high ranking officials. At first, the procession looked lame compared to what I saw on Chinese television. Instead of tanks

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and cannons, there were marching bands and kids pulling floats. Instead of thousands of expressionless soldiers marching and saluting, there were laughing civilians waving their flags at the spectators. Instead of having people drafted into a 2 month long boot camp in preparation of the parade, people volunteered to be a part of something that showed how much they loved their country. Instead of officials placing huge flags at places that will show up the best in the camera, everyone was buying flags they bought out of their own free will. There were so many things that surprised me in that one parade.

But through two Independence Day Parades, I also learned how differently these two country's citizens and government express their patriotism. When my family moved back to the US the next year, I saw even more differences in everyday life. When I attended public school for the first time in America, I learned things the Chinese government would never have put into their curriculum. The teachers taught us mistakes America made in the past, and how a responsibility of a citizen is to criticize the government when necessary. Surprisingly, we weren't taught to blindly follow the government wherever it goes, or to follow standards to better express our patriotism. Not a single teacher lectured on how everyone must all be model citizens who view and treat the government like their god.

But instead, I learned that a true Patriot is not a hypocrite. In China, it was easy to see who looked like a Patriot, and who didn't. Patriotic things were done for the benefit of appearance. Even the Guo Qin Jie Parade was a show. The reason the Independence Day for China even exists was to laugh at its former government. The point is to look powerful and intimidating to its own people and other countries. However, a true Patriot does not do things for others to see. That is the biggest difference in how Patriotism is viewed in these two countries. That is what I learned in my three years living in this country.

America is different. It doesn't ask for someone who believes America is perfect, or someone who only buys products made in America. All it asks for is love for one's country, and in a way, it asks more than China does. I had already memorized the steps I can take to seem Patriotic, but I can't pretend to love my country. That is why nobody can define what Patriotism looks like in America, because it means so many different things to the diverse group of people who call themselves Americans. Some volunteer to

be in the military, because to them, love is sacrificing themselves for the good of the country. Others serve as their community's leader or representative because love could mean changing their surrounding neighborhoods for the better. Patriots would put up huge American flags because this is the way they express how glad they are to be an American. People create stories, poems, songs, movies and art to show their pride and loyalty for their country. But those people aren't the only patriots.

There are volunteer Park Rangers in National Parks. There are people organizing food drives without receiving any payment. There are kindhearted strangers sending items to the soldiers overseas. There are guides explaining the memorials to the tourist groups. There is a man sitting on the sidewalk, singing "America, The Beautiful" over and over again. There are voters lining up on Election Day. There are protestors outside the White House, demanding change. There are veterans being thanked by the people they sacrificed for. There are people donating their blood. There are passionate politicians trying to influence their country for the better. There are firefighters, rescue workers and policemen whose priority is to protect others. There are millions of people doing honorable and respectful things. There are millions of patriots.

Love is hard to define. Synonyms the dictionary provides includes: affection, fondness, attachment, enthusiasm for, appreciation, passion, zeal, devotion, dedication... the list goes on and on. Therefore, what Patriotism means in today's America can never be truly defined. It could mean singing the National Anthem and the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag in the morning. It could mean wearing red, white and blue. It could mean praising one's government, if the government deserves it. It could mean watching Patriotic movies and listening to Patriotic songs. But it doesn't have to mean those things. Love is stronger with actions. But love for one's country is stronger than Patriotic actions without love.

The Ceremony

As a teen whose eyes were opening for the first time, I watched families walk up the aisle to the certificate waiting for each of them. I watched them bring up their kids- kids who had become citizens through their parent's naturalization- to take pictures. I watched the faces of the young and old as they flashed their teeth in hearty smiles. I watched their cameras flash, forever freezing that joyous moment on a screen. I watched a few of them tend to crying babies that refused to acknowledge the importance of the event. I watched as lives were changed forever.

I'll admit, I've never done much for America. I've never blown stuff up in my backyard on Independence Day, nor have I ever waved a miniature flag watching the annual concert at the National Mall. I've never watched any President's inauguration without feeling slightly bored one or twice. I've only recited the pledge of allegiance with true passion and conviction a few times; and I say it every morning during school. I certainly have never risked my life for my country.

But with Independence Day only a few days past, and a patriotism essay in the making, I wonder whether true love of country is only shown in actions. If it is, well, I probably wouldn't be the most patriotic person in America. In fact, I'd probably be one of the least. But I believe that love of country isn't in the amount of fireworks you've blasted into the air, or the number of Presidents you can list.

This past school year, I met my favorite teacher in sixth period on the first day of school. At first he didn't seem like much; just your average middle-aged Civics teacher. But after that first week, he shed his plain skin and *really* taught us Civics.

I wouldn't know how he did it, but he could teach. We would have assignments that most kids would probably groan about, but somehow Mr. Schlobach made them exciting. A "Fix the Debt" simulation, a Constitutional Convention, a "Crisis" simulation, debates...we had assignment after assignment that seemed stressful at first, but became the highlights of our eighth grade education.

The assignments that everyone enjoyed, yet probably most often procrastinated on, were the speeches. Around every month, we would be given a topic and a time frame to base our speech on. Although many of us weren't the best example of good time management while creating these speeches, they were enjoyable to listen to and present.

In my opinion, the most memorable speech topic was the assignment he gave us in November. Our assignment was to write a congratulatory speech to a group of newly naturalized citizens, which we would present to our classmates. Twelve students with the most thoughtful speeches would be chosen to recite their speech at a Naturalization Ceremony during the winter.

When my parents became naturalized, they didn't allow me to attend their ceremonies, since both occurred during school. I had helped my mother out a bit during the process of studying for her test, so I admit I was curious about the ceremony and disappointed that I wasn't allowed to witness the oath. When I received the speech topic, I made up my mind that I would write the best paper I could and try to make up for lost time by attending a ceremony later on.

After all the speeches had been written and presented, it took about a week for the results to finally come out. Our papers were given to other teachers for evaluation. Collectively, the teachers would make the final decision. One afternoon, Mr. Schlobach

finally announced that the results would be posted after seventh period. I sprinted down the hall after my seventh period science class, not stopping once, even when I almost knocked my friend over.

When I finally got to the door of the classroom, I waited impatiently for the seventh period class to file out so that Mr. Schlobach could post the results. But I didn't have to wait long. As soon as a few students came out, one of my peers faced me and gave me a hearty congratulation.

"What for?" I asked, startled. I still hadn't caught on yet.

"Because your speech got chosen! Why else?" He gave me a funny look, and walked away.

I was absolutely elated. I read the results taped to the door over and over, until the stark black ink and plain white paper mixed into a blur. The one thing that managed to tear me away from the door of room one eleven was the prospect of missing my bus.

The ceremony I attended was held on a brisk day in November. As my mother and I walked towards the brick building, the howling wind whipped my dress against my legs, chilling the bare skin that was exposed. We quickly fled through the doors to warmth and safety.

Shivering, we shuffled into an official-looking government building, greeted by the stern faces of security guards. Thankfully, Mr. Schlobach and the rest of the student speakers were present to welcome us as we went through the security checks together. After fumbling around with bags and other items, we made it through security. A USCIS worker whisked us into the building and to the location of the ceremony.

Squeezed into a metal elevator, we waited patiently while the employee pressed a few buttons. After a period of uncomfortable silence, Mr. Schlobach spoke up.

“Are you guys nervous?”

“Yes!” Kim exclaimed with fear. Olivia quickly gave the same answer.

“A little bit,” I stated. Devon just shrugged his shoulders.

Witnessing our concise remarks, the USCIS employee cracked a smile as we reached our floor. We were led down the hall where we could see the beginning of the ceremony.

A small crowd of eager faces sat in a room facing a wooden podium where we would soon be speaking. The various ethnicities mingled together in perfect harmony, like ice cream scoops on a cone; each their own distinct flavor, yet wonderful when paired together.

As we walked down the hall, we often saw employees greeting each other with friendly smile and amiable conversation. Their expressions practically mirrored those of the newly immigrated: glowing faces showcasing a mixture of happiness and possibility.

It must be delightful to work here. Everyday you see the faces of hope and optimism in everybody, even your coworkers. Lost in my own thoughts, I almost walked into the door of our waiting room.

We entered a small conference room and sat down in various spots around the table. Talking and joking around with each other, we tried to push our feelings of anxiety away from us as the time to head to the ceremony inched closer and closer. When the time finally came, we sucked in deep breaths and filed out the door.

We walked back towards the ceremony, feeling increasingly nervous yet extremely excited at the same time. Stopping right near the entrance, the four of us got in order of appearance. I was assigned to speak first.

As the national anthem began to ring across the room, I placed my sweaty hand on my heart, trying to ignore the gigantic monkeys prancing around in my stomach. I could hear my heartbeat hammering louder than the song itself. "Oh say (*pound, pound*) can you see? (*pound, pound*) By the dawn's (*pound, pound*) early light..."

Eventually, I started to hum to keep my mind off my heartbeat. That in turn became singing. Soon a few of the others were following in my example, trying to forget their nerves and enjoy the moment. I found myself smiling as I sang, watching the various new citizens sing along as best they could.

Before I knew it, the last words had been sung, and the song was over. *It was a lot shorter than usual*, I thought, wiping my perspiring hands against my dress as I watched the citizens sit back down. I turned my head to tell my opinions to Kim, but a whisper made me turn back around.

"*Look! They're taking the oath!*" I whisked my head back and watched as a throng of hands rose over the crowd. A multitude of colors greeted me as I scanned the crowd. Some hands were smaller, smoother, and younger, with a whole future ahead of them. Others were scarred with signs of rough work or aging. Nevertheless, the various hands became one as the words of the oath moved across the lips of their owners. The group had recited the final oath and become American citizens.

Finally, it was time for the speeches to be given. Strangely, as I walked up to the podium to congratulate the various young and elderly faces, I felt my nerves fly away as

easily as a breeze that caresses the stars and stripes on a warm spring morning. Perhaps the wonder of what I had just seen had blown it gently away. Perhaps I felt it was foolish to feel nervous when delivering a speech to such kind faces. As I walked up and faced the horde of people, I smiled, and delivered my speech.

After I finished, I headed towards the back where my mother was waiting. Listening to my peers deliver their speeches, I couldn't help wondering: *how many countries were represented at such a diverse occasion? How many families and younger children have been affected by this ceremony? How many people did the American government gift with happiness a few minutes ago?* I was certain that in a place far away, another group of people had experienced the happiness involved with becoming a citizen, just as the newly naturalized people in the crowd had.

As my peers concluded their speeches, the citizens were called up one by one to receive their certificates. I hadn't realized how many families had been naturalized until now. Many parents, as well as their older children, had gone through the naturalization process together, and took their oath together as well. Crowding the front of the room, citizen after citizen smiled as employees took their pictures. Mothers and fathers held wailing babies as they captured the moment in lens. Families called up younger members to join in as they joyfully and proudly displayed their certificates.

I felt like I was intruding in such a special moment, but at the same time, I felt a feeling of belonging. The feeling was beautiful, yet almost indescribable. This special moment in which I watched happiness being given to a whole room was priceless. I could feel my senses putting the various puzzle pieces of the scene into place, creating an unforgettable image- a perfect picture- remembered on my heart's crowded walls.

Before the ceremony, when the word "patriotism" was mentioned, I would usually just listen on with a bored expression. The word barely meant a thing to me, because I myself had not experienced an event to show me the true meaning. After the special ceremony, I felt a change. Anytime "patriotism" is mentioned, I think back to the ceremony. I think back to the smiling faces watching me eagerly while I recited my speech. I think back to the friendly employees greeting each other with love and kindness. I think back to the wailing children who couldn't possibly understand the gift they had been given: the gift of citizenship.

But mostly, I think back to the hands that rose high into the air. Hands that will shape the history of America. I think back to the voices reciting the oath. Voices that will spread the American dream. I think back to the children with eager, watchful eyes. Children that will be the future of our nation.

Then I shift back to reality, thinking of the true definition of patriotism. Patriotism is not simply national loyalty. It has millions of definitions, each tucked neatly away in the pockets of American hearts. As for me, it is the indescribable feeling I felt at the ceremony; the feeling I also feel now. It is a love of the way the United States of America can let everyone have their own dreams and follow their own destinies. It is the love of the way America can give happiness to those who want to follow our ancestors. It is a love of how America- the land of the free- lays the first stepping stones of a dream down onto the river of opportunity.